White House Funds Cache Is Alleged

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Former presidential assistant H. R. (Bob) Haldeman kept in his White House safe a private cash "gift" fund from which selected White House aides were paid $1,000 or more each in moving expenses when they joined or left the Nixon administration, according to sworn testimony by a former aide to Haldeman.

Lawrence Higby, the former Haldeman aide, said he did not know how much money was in the fund. He testified that the envelope containing the cash was two inches thick and that only $20 and $100 bills could be seen in it.

Higby testified, in a newly unsealed deposition in a civil suit growing out of the Watergate affair, that he himself received a "gift" of cash from the envelope and made disbursals from the fund to two other White House aides, Bill Gavin, in 1970, and Harry Dent, in 1972.

Higby's attorney, Al Philip Kane, said last night that he understood the money was given to Haldeman by a "private individual" in 1968, but that he did not know the person's name.

"I'd describe it as a private trust fund," Kane said in a telephone interview last night. "The White House had young men coming here from California and other states. It costs money to move, and the government wasn't paying for it."

Kane said that the money did not include leftover campaign funds from the 1968 presidential election. "It was very definitely not campaign funds. That is my understanding," Kane said.

Haldeman's attorney, John J. Wilson, said he could not comment on the fund because of a pretrail publicity order against defendants in the Watergate cover-up criminal case. Haldeman is charged with obstruction of justice and perjury in that indictment, "and I don't know if the fund might come into the

See FUND, A10, Col. 1

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criminal trial," Wilson said. He added, however, that he knew about the fund that Higby had referred to.

There appeared to be no relationship between the new cash fund described by Higby and several later secret funds of hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash kept by former presidential aides and lawyers that went to finance the Watergate bugging operation, other political espionage and numerous secret political investigations.

The disclosure of the new Haldeman fund came in a sworn deposition by Higby under questioning by Democratic lawyers in connection with a civil suit by the Democrats against the 1972 Nixon re-election committee in connection with the Watergate burglary. The deposition, taken last December, was unsealed in court yesterday.

Higby testified that he did not know the total amount of money in the fund or exactly how much he gave to Gavin or Dent.

"I'm not precise on the amount. I would guess $1,000 or $1,500. The purpose of giving the money was to cover moving expenses related to the White House, to coming aboard at the White House, or, in Mr. Dent's case, he never got moving expenses when he came aboard and Mr. Haldeman wanted to give him some when he was at the White House.

"It was my understanding that this was a gift that Mr. Haldeman had received that was to be passed on to those members of the staff who needed funds for that purpose," Higby said in the sworn statement.

Gavin came to the White House in 1969 from the University of Pennsylvania. He had served as a speech assistant during the 1968 presidential campaign.

Higby said he gave the money to Gavin "when he left the White House staff, which I think was 1970." Gavin went to the U.S. Information Agency in mid-1970, and is now a special assistant on the staff of Sen. James L. Buckley (R,Con-N.Y.).

Reached at his home last night, Gavin said he remembered being given less than $500 by Higby in late 1969. He said it was "ridiculous" for Higby to have said he gave Gavin as much as $1,000, or any amount in 1970.

"As I recall, I went to his office in 1969 in the White House and he gave me an envelope and said, 'This is for moving expenses,'" Gavin said. He said he had not been promised any such expenses at the time he joined the staff.

Gavin said further he did not know the money had come from Haldeman's office and did not remember if or how he had reported the money on his income tax return.

Higby testified that Dent was also given his money when he left the White House staff in 1970. Dent was an administrative assistant to Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) before joining the White House staff. Dent could not be reached for comment early last night.

Higby said the money in Haldeman's safe "wasn't a fund that was replenished. I think it was something that was given to him in late 1968 after the election and he put it there and drew upon it occasionally."

Haldeman himself described the fund to Higby as "a gift," Higby testified in the deposition.

"To my knowledge, other people did receive money from Mr. Haldeman as I understood it, before we ever were in the White House," Higby added. Higby could not be reached last night, and his attorney said he did not know how many White House employees had received the gifts.

Kane, Higby's attorney, said further that to his understanding there was no formula for distributing the money. "It was on an ad hoc basis," he said.